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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 001695

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MO](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: MOROCCANS FURIOUS OVER SPANISH ROYAL VISIT TO
ENCLAVES, BUT STRONG TIES WILL ENDURE

REF: RABAT 1687

Classified by Charge d'Affaires Robert P. Jackson for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Moroccan government is reacting strongly to the announced visit of Spanish King Juan Carlos to the disputed enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Following blistering criticism of the intended visit by PM El-Fassi and Information Minister Naciri, the GOM announced in the afternoon of November 2 that it was recalling its Ambassador in Madrid for consultations. A senior MFA official we spoke with expressed exasperation over the development but implied that the relationship would weather the storm. A Spanish diplomat told us they had received a similar message of anger mixed with resignation from their MFA contacts. Despite the public flash of anger, we doubt the incident will do sustained damage to the relationship. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Moroccan government did not take lying down news that Spanish King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia were planning their first visit to Ceuta and Melilla, the Spanish enclaves on the Mediterranean coast claimed by Morocco. (We understand both enclaves will be visited November 5, with no overnight stop.) Prime Minister El-Fassi late on November 1 expressed "deep regret" at the decision and warned it would impact the bilateral relationship. Information Minister (and government spokesman) Khalid Naciri told local media on November 1 that the GOM rejected the visit and was very disappointed by the decision. Speaking on pan-Arab Al-Jazeera TV, Naciri warned "the Spanish government must understand there are red lines not to be crossed." Moroccan independent media also had an angry, nationalistic reaction. The wide circulation Al-Massae criticized the Spanish monarch for violating tradition and "implementing the occupation" of the enclaves.

¶3. (C) Youssef Amrani, Director-General for Bilateral Affairs and the third ranking diplomat at the Moroccan Foreign Ministry, told PolCouns during a November 2 meeting that the Spanish decision was "not astute" and "disturbed the atmosphere" between the two countries. He noted that Spain and Morocco had been undergoing several years of improved ties and confidence building, manifested most recently by Crown Prince Felipe's late October visit, which generated positive coverage in Moroccan media. Amrani implied that the relationship was durable enough to weather the storm.

¶4. (C) Similarly, a Spanish diplomat told PolCouns on November 2 that he had discussed the issue with a senior contact at the MFA. Heated complaints from the Moroccan side were followed by assurances that bilateral cooperation would

continue as usual. Asked why King Juan Carlos had chosen to break with tradition and conduct the visit, the Spaniard noted that the King has been under domestic political pressure on a variety of issues from all sides, particularly the right wing. This pressure may have prompted the King to conduct a muscular gesture, he speculated.

15. (C) News that Morocco was "indefinitely" recalling its Ambassador in Madrid for consultations broke on the afternoon of November 2. A (separate) Spanish diplomat told D/PolCouns his Embassy was taken by surprise by the decision. He noted that Vice President Maria Teresa Fernandez De La Vega had insisted after a Council of Ministers meeting on November 2 that the King Juan Carlos' visit should not have an impact on Spain's relations with Morocco. News of the withdrawal of Morocco's Ambassador appeared to belie this hope, our Spanish contact opined.

16. (C) Comment: We assess that the GOM felt it had to react loudly and publicly to Juan Carlos' visit. Whatever its intended purpose, the visit was bound to irritate Morocco, which continues to claim the enclaves. We also assess that this angry public reaction will not impact the underlying calculus behind Morocco's robust cooperation with Spain, and this incident will not cause sustained damage to their bilateral relationship. End comment.

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